

Chalk streams hit by 14,000 hours of sewage discharges last year

England's chalk streams are a source of great national pride. Chalk streams are a unique waterway found primarily in the South of England and Yorkshire. They have been referred to as "England's rainforest" for their special qualities which allow wildlife and plants to thrive. They are a haven for iconic species like the otter, kingfisher and salmon amongst many others.

Today's new analysis of Environment Agency data finds they are being polluted with endless amounts of sewage discharges.

This truly is scandalous. Chalk streams must be protected from these destructive sewage dumps."

Ed Davey

The worst offender is Wessex Water, guilty of 1,013 separate sewage discharges into chalk streams across the West of England.

The worst chalk stream sewage discharge lasted a staggering 2,969 hours in the River Till, a tributary of the Hampshire Avon in Wiltshire by Wessex Water, which is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest as it is home to the Water Crowfoot, providing habitat for fish and snails.

Meanwhile, Thames Water discharged sewage into the Misbourne in Buckinghamshire for 1,206 hours last year. Southern Water discharged sewage 62 times in the River Meon last year, lasting over 1,000 hours.

The figure for sewage discharges may be much higher than feared. The Liberal Democrats have uncovered a large number of monitors designed to measure sewage overflows are in fact broken. **One in five sewage discharges in chalk streams either had a faulty monitor or no monitor installed at all.** Shockingly, one in four of Yorkshire Water's sewage monitors setup in chalk streams was recorded as broken last year. Across the country, one in ten chalk stream sewage monitors were faulty last year according to Environment Agency data.

Stop Sewage Dumping

Tax water companies' huge profits and fix our sewage system.

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I've been a carer most of my life, for my mother, my grandmother and now, along with my wife Emily, for our son John. My family, like so many, relies on professional carers every day. It's heartbreaking that for many people, that essential care is not available.

In May last year it was reported that half a million people in England were waiting for care. Vulnerable people are being left stranded in hospital due to the lack of space in care homes. Or unable to go home after finishing hospital treatment, simply because the follow-up care they need doesn't exist. This takes an enormous toll on them and their families, while putting even more pressure on our strained NHS.

This isn't caused by NHS inefficiency, or bad management, as the Conservatives might want us to believe. It's a symptom of a failing social care system that no one has had the bravery to try and fix properly.

Time and again, the Conservatives have promised to "fix" the crisis in social care. They pledged that no one would have to sell their house to pay for care – and that they wouldn't raise taxes to do it, either.

But they have broken all these promises.

The Conservatives' so-called plans come nowhere near to fixing the crisis.

Proper reform of social care is one of the biggest challenges facing our country. It cannot wait any longer.

That's why Liberal Democrats are bringing forward a proper solution. Working with experts, industry leaders and care staff themselves, we have developed a plan to fix the crisis in social care, once and for all.

Our plan, passed by Liberal Democrat members today, would:

- Ensure no one has to sell their home to pay for care by introducing free personal care, based on the model introduced by the Scottish Liberal Democrat-Labour government in 2002.
- Introduce a more generous means test and assistance for those unable to pay for their accommodation costs.
- Move towards a preventative approach to social care, so people can stay in their own homes for longer.
- Introduce a real living wage for care workers and invest in skills, professionalisation and accreditation of the workforce.
- Provide a package to support unpaid carers.

This means no one would have to sell their home to pay for care. That carers will be properly paid and valued for the essential, skilled work they do. And that everyone with care needs will be empowered to live independently and with dignity.

Our plan for free personal care covers nursing care, help with personal hygiene, immobility problems and medication.

Those needing care would still have to pay for their accommodation, but we are also bringing in more generous means testing which means those unable to pay those costs would still be supported. For those living at home, they would continue to pay their mortgages, rent, bills, food costs and taxes as they did before receiving care.

And after years of being ignored by the Conservatives, we want to finally make sure that unpaid carers are given the support and recognition they deserve.

The fact that people who are ready to be discharged are stuck in hospital due to a lack of caring capacity is hitting our NHS too. This is about making the system more efficient and supporting people with their care needs.

It's clear the Conservatives are completely failing at the task at hand. They cannot be trusted to provide everyone with the high-quality social care they need. So it's time for change.

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